

News Update

November 2000

City of Dreams - launch in Canberra

This documentary film on the collaboration of Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin will be officially launched by Senator Richard Alston, Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts in Canberra on 2 November. Due to the small theatre, it is by invitation only.

City of Dreams - Sydney screening

The film will make its Sydney debut on Saturday 4 November at the WOW 2000 film festival, Chauvel Cinema, Paddington at 5.45pm. Followed by Q & A with filmmakers. See enclosed flyer for further details. Tickets \$13, concession and Griffin Society members \$10. Bookings telephone 9332 2408.

City of Dreams - Perth screening

A screening in Perth will take place on Thursday 30 November at the Octagon Theatre at the University of Western Australia, at 8.00pm. A small exhibition on the Griffins' association with Western Australia will be displayed on the night. Anyone wishing to attend should ring Christopher Vernon on tel (08) 9380 1565.

City of Dreams - a review

The premiere screening of *City of Dreams* was held on Sunday 23rd July 2000, as part of the 49th Melbourne International Film Festival. Even though the major venue of the Film Festival was Griffin's Capitol Theatre, owing to the lack of a quality video projector in The Capitol, *City of Dreams* had to be screened in the Treasury Theatre.

After three years of research and months of filming, the lives of the Griffins has finally been told in this superbly produced documentary by Film Australia. The director of *City of Dreams*, Belinda Mason, the producer Gaby Mason and their team are to be

congratulated on the presentation which combines original film footage, modern day shots, re-enactments of the Griffins at work and at leisure as well as interviews with some eminent Griffin scholars.

Belinda Mason is also to be praised for taking the trouble to read 'The Magic of America' and portraying Marion's record of events of the Griffins' architectural and private lives. Their story evolves on film, set against a background of Australian and world events to bring it all into context.

The documentary follows chronologically from their years in Frank Lloyd Wright's Oak Park Studio to their struggles to create Canberra (their *City of Dreams*) and to develop their vision of the Castlecrag and Haven Estates in NSW. It then moves to India, where Walter and Marion spent fifteen months energetically designing all manner of structures in and around Lucknow. As few of Walter's Indian works survive, we have Marion's exquisite perspectives of the built and unbuilt projects as testament of their genius.

If there was anything to criticise about the documentary when it ended, it was that I wanted to see more about the Griffins. The 55 minutes of brilliantly edited video was not enough. There was a loud and spontaneous 'round of applause' from the appreciative audience at the conclusion of the premiere screening.

Peter Navaretti

(Editor's note: Peter Navaretti is Heritage Strategy Planner at RMIT, Melbourne, and is co-editor of *The Griffins in Australia and India*. At the Melbourne International Film Festival, *City of Dreams* was voted amongst the top ten documentaries.)

Glebe Incinerator - recommendation for Interim Heritage Order

The Heritage Council of New South Wales has recently recommended the making of an Interim Heritage Order on the Glebe Incinerator, its

colonnaded sheds and precinct. Glebe Incinerator is one of seven incinerators designed by Walter Burley Griffin that were built in Sydney. Of these seven only two survive - Glebe and Willoughby incinerators. Glebe Incinerator was built in 1932 and the Conservation Study prepared by Meredith Walker and Trevor Waters for Leichhardt Council states that the incinerator and sheds "with their rare surviving details, are a substantial component of the evidence of the final phase of Walter Burley Griffin's work in Australia."

out to define the new nation by an idealised articulation of its indigenous landscape. In complement with individual buildings, he designed domestic gardens, suburban communities, and entire towns. For him, the collective design of the larger landscape constituted a literal 'landscape architecture'.

'Through holistic landscape design, he hoped, more fundamentally, to create an Antipodean Arcadia, a habitable "second nature" — one referential to its

increasingly more remote, primeval counterpart — and resolve a perceived dialectic between nature and culture'. Griffin's designs, many undoubtedly conceived in collaboration with Marion, ultimately were object lessons that development and bushland conservation need not be mutually exclusive endeavours. This, coupled with their appreciation and pioneering use of Australian flora in landscape architecture (and early participation in the conservation



ABOVE: Photo titled "Lunch Hour at the Council Depot" published in the Mayor's Report 1935-1937 for the Municipality of The Glebe. Note on right, one of the two colonnaded sheds that flank the vista to the temple-like Incinerator. Photograph courtesy Max Solling.

Walter Burley Griffin in Perth

In his native United States, Walter Burley Griffin until only recently was remembered as but an obscure protégé of that nation's most celebrated architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. Common to both nations is the perception of Griffin as essentially an architect, and the related recognition of his achievements within that profession (architect and social critic Robin Boyd first singled out Griffin as a 'pioneer of modern architecture' in the 1940s). However, as the two recent books and the major exhibition at the Powerhouse demonstrate, this perception is far too restrictive and diverges significantly from fact. Griffin also was educated in and practised landscape architecture and his, along with Marion's, achievements went far 'beyond architecture'.

As set out in *Beyond Architecture: Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin in America, Australia, India*, published by Sydney's Powerhouse Museum Griffin's design vision was comprehensive in its scope. Upon his 1914 arrival in Australia, Griffin set

movement), form the basis of their legacy. The landscape dimension of the Griffins' Australian legacy not only has proven to be of continuing social relevance, but it also contrasts sharply with their legacy in the United States. There, perhaps owing to their comparatively brief and limited American practice, the significance of their work is less broadly-based and more narrowly confined to architectural history.

Canberra understandably continues to loom large in the Griffin legend. It was, after all, the very reason he came to Australia. Within six years of his arrival to supervise the city's construction, however, Griffin's endeavours had been undermined by political antagonisms, and his official appointment was abolished in 1920. No doubt demoralised, he disassociated himself from the still embryonic city. Tragically, he never lived to see much of Canberra built. It was not until nearly three decades after his death, for example, that the lake which bears his name and a feature crucial to the original design, was constructed at the federal capital (albeit to a design much altered from his own).

Ethereally, however, a 1935 visit to Perth had given him an apparition of the Canberra that was yet to be. Writing home to his beloved Marion in Sydney,

Walter reported that Perth's 'rawness and newness' will 'disappear sometime when the advantages of a waterfront site, much like Canberra with the lakes, is realised.' 'Mr Davidson' (see below), Griffin continued, 'is fully aware of the similarity and the possibilities and is using his strong influence toward directing the official architectural development onto the Perth Water Terraces where formal reclamation parkways are being formed'. Although popular perception geographically links Griffin to Canberra and the Eastern states, Griffin's Perth visit actually marked the culmination of his twenty-year association with Western Australia.

The Griffins in Australia and India, the second recent and monumental book, catalogues the 250 projects of the Griffins' Australian practice and includes a collection of interpretative essays by Griffin scholars. Seeming 'one-offs' or not readily explained 'outliers amongst an oeuvre of works otherwise concentrated in Sydney and Melbourne, Griffin's enigmatic Perth designs and affiliations are the subject of Christopher Vernon's current research. A Senior Lecturer in Landscape Architecture at the University of Western Australia and contributor to both books and the exhibition, Vernon hopes that readers might be able to assist his endeavour to distil the ether of the Griffin legend and reconstruct a comprehensive narrative of the West Australian work.

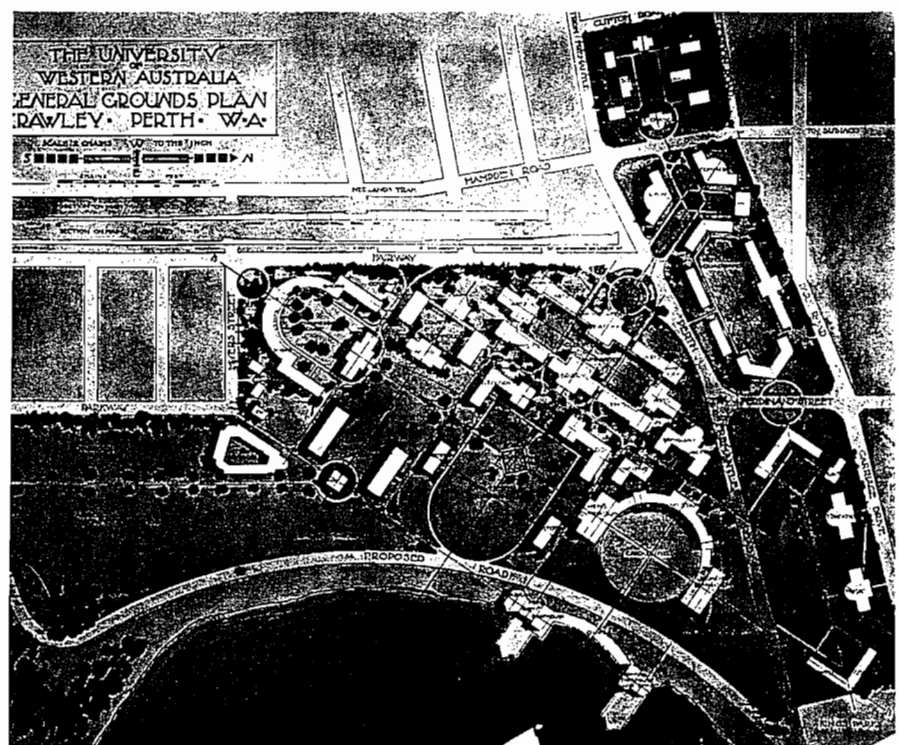
For Vernon, the trail of Perth clues unexpectedly began in New Zealand in 1995. There, amongst the papers of Griffin's architect brother-in-law in an Auckland archive, Vernon uncovered a reproduction of Griffin's 1914 design for the University of Western Australia's (UWA) then still-only-envisaged campus at Crawley. This landscape design later proved to be a submission to the University's little known international design competition. Long forgotten in Perth, Griffin's UWA design was publicly displayed for the first time since 1915 in last year's Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery exhibition 'The Pre-eminence of Landscape', co-curated by Vernon. That Griffin's design was prepared within only months after the émigré architect's arrival in Australia suggests the likelihood that he learnt of the competition from his new Perth colleague, George Temple-Poole (also officially affiliated with Canberra). Scant information on the competition itself has come to light, however, and it remains a mystery as to why Griffin's design failed to attract a prize. Upon examining the design some eighty-five years later, it remains curiously relevant.

An 'ideal city' (reminiscent of Canberra itself) in miniature, Griffin's plan featured expansive parklands, uniting Matilda Bay with the University's buildings. The built reality of the Crawley campus which eventuated, however, contrasts sharply with Griffin's vision: today the Bay is visually, if not physically, severed from the campus by a heavily-trafficked thoroughfare, car parks and buildings (fortunately, through careful re-design, this connection is not beyond recovery).

Clues next point to 1922. That year Griffin was commissioned by the Young Australia League for the design of its Perth office. Griffin responded with a design for a three-storey building, replete with a garden courtyard, to be constructed of reinforced concrete. That April, according to the *West Australian*, the foundation stone was laid and it appeared that, at last, Griffin would build in Perth. Mysteriously and at the 11th hour, however, his design was set aside and replaced with one by local architect Lionel Boas. How did Griffin, then resident in Melbourne, come to receive this Perth commission? Did he, for example, already have contacts amongst its membership? Was Temple-Poole involved?

Why was Griffin's design abandoned? To date, answers elude. Griffin's next convergence with Perth (albeit a vicarious one) came less than a decade later. In 1930, Western Australia's first state town planner David L Davidson (1893-1952), then newly

BELOW: Crawley campus, University of Western Australia, 1915, rendered competition plan drawing reproduced in *The Griffins in Australia and India*, p.120



arrived from Sydney himself, organised a Perth exhibition of the work of his friends the Griffins. Apart from ascertaining that Marion's exquisite

renderings of Walter's architecture comprised the display, the other exhibition particulars, such as the specific date and venue, remain lost.

Frustratingly, one is left to guess at local reaction to the work. One notable exception has come to light, however. Noted Perth architect and landscape architect, the late John Oldham attended the exhibition and, for him, the Griffins' works proved influential. Were Oldham and Davidson alone in their admiration? Enigmatically, Griffin himself reported that Davidson undertook the exhibition 'in spite of determined opposition of the Perth architects'.

Griffin's association with Perth concluded in 1935. Having secured important new commissions in India, he visited Fremantle and Perth enroute to the sub-continent that October. During his Perth visit (to date, the only one known), Griffin liaised with Davidson and toured the city centre and the University ('bush'-walking from the latter to the former via King's Park, as 'the wildflower season [was] on'). After boarding the SS Mongolia at Fremantle, he agreed to a last-minute interview with the *West Australian*. Queried as to his impressions of the city, Griffin first responded with his admiration for the University's newly built, 'beautiful' 'Spanish-Romanesque' architecture. Less favourably, he next assessed St George's College as being 'a little out of date' and that it 'failed to harmonise with its surroundings'. More critically and perhaps most controversially, Griffin asserted that 'most other Perth buildings', instead of expressing modern ideas, were 'in the conventional, formalistic style'. However, he optimistically concluded that: 'Perth offers great opportunities, if its people would recognise that architecture is an art not something wholly rational and utilitarian, but something with that tinge of irrationality to which all art is heir'. Anticipating a return to Fremantle en route back from India (to again consult with Davidson), Griffin then departed. Reality, however, deviated profoundly from his plans: he died of peritonitis in Lucknow, never again returning to Australia.

Whilst all of Griffin's known Perth projects remain idealised visions recorded only on

paper, the works importantly reflect both the architecture and landscape dimensions of the Griffin legacy. Yet the narrative so far reconstructed remains sketchy and many queries linger. Yet events potentially remain within living memory, so Vernon is keen to hear from readers. Christopher.Vernon

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(Christopher Vernon is Senior Lecturer in Landscape Architecture, School of Architecture and Fine Arts, UWA.)

Third printing of *Beyond Architecture: Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin in America, Australia, India*

Sales of this wonderful book have continued so strongly even after the Griffin exhibition of the same name closed well over a year ago, that when the book sold out earlier this year Powerhouse Publishing decided on a third print run, taking the total to 6,000 books. 800 copies have been purchased by the University of Illinois Press for sale in the United States. The book is edited by Anne Watson and its recommended retail price is \$39.95.

Two knitlock houses sold in Victoria

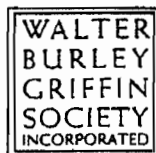
The knitlock house designed for Ethel and Vaughn Griffin (no relation to Walter and Marion) and built in 1924 at Darebin Street, Heidelberg, Melbourne was sold last August, for about \$264,000.

Another knitlock house designed by Walter Burley Griffin, the Wills Residence in Dickens Street, Woodend, approximately 70km north west of Melbourne was sold very recently. The Wills Residence was built for Alban H.Wills, co-proprietor of Wills and Paton Pty Ltd, who had two Edison Phonograph and Record Shops in Collins Street and one in Bendigo. Built in 1929, it is described as "one of Walter Burley Griffin's most brilliantly planned homes in Knitlock construction" in *The Griffins in Australia and India*

(Thanks to WBGs member Steven Barlow for forwarding this news about the Heidelberg house, and to Peter Navaretti for the news about the Woodend house.)

News Update editors Adrienne Kabos (9958 2060) and Kerry McKillop (02 9958 4516).

MEMBERSHIP FORM



MEMBERSHIP

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Date: _____

Amount Enclosed \$ _____

Please make cheque payable to
Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc. and post it to
The Treasurer at 140 Edinburgh Rd, Castlecrag, NSW 2068.

The Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc. was established in 1988 and aims to create a greater awareness and appreciation of the Griffins' town planning and architecture and thereby encourage the conservation of their internationally significant work. The Society produces a newsletter and regularly organises meetings with guest speakers. If you would like to join the Society in Australia fill out the form opposite.

Individual	\$ 15pa
Student	\$ 5pa
Individual overseas	\$ 25pa
Community organisations	\$ 25pa
Business organisations	\$ 50pa

In a number of 1914 issues of *Building* the chapters of the book *Town Planning for Australia* by George A Taylor were reproduced. The June 12, 1914 issue of *Building* published six chapters or sections on pages 64 to 96. Reproduced below is edited text from Sections VIII to X.

"In view of the general interest which the science of town planning is attracting in this part of the world, *Town Planning for Australia* by George A Taylor, makes an opportune appearance. The author is a well-known authority on this subject, and is one of the pioneers of the movement, towards the beautification of our cities....

Section VII THE NEW NATION

The decision to build an Australian capital city suggested that, in the first glow of national enthusiasm, the spirit of town planning would possess the powers of the period, if not the community at large. Not so. With the final selection of the site there began an era of official mal-administration that was extraordinary.

The new Federal Government came into power, and under its rule a system of day-labor construction was introduced. The inefficient administration of this system scattered over £150,000 in faulty construction and wasteful labour that would have been saved had the work been carried out under proper competitive contracts by skilled builders and engineers.

Concrete houses were erected at great expense, and roads constructed before any definite scheme was decided upon.

Constructional inefficiency was manifested almost everywhere. A water supply system had to be reconstructed owing to faulty design in pipes and pumping plant, and a sewerage system had to be remodelled owing to defective arrangement.

It was a grim lesson wisely learnt in our national youth. In city development it is advisable to have all constructional work carried out by skilled builders, under a proper competitive contract system.

In the framing of the conditions for the competition for the capital, the ineptitude of the administration was

blame, as he practically followed the advice submitted to him in a report prepared by three of the administrative officers with whom was associated the State Architect for New South Wales, Colonel Vernon. It should be noted that the latter, on his appointment, requested the architectural institute of his State to suggest any requirements, but no response was made, and the conditions were framed and issued.

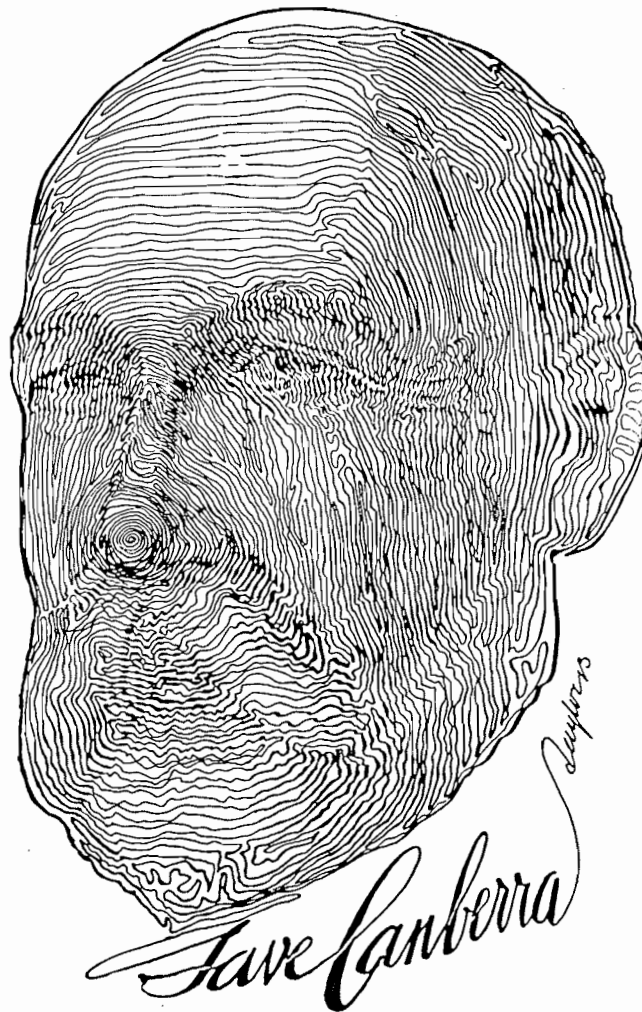
The contour plan, issued with the competition conditions, was also somewhat misleading. It had a proposed railway line that lead to the baulking of a good many competitors, and the creation of absurdities by others in vain attempts to plan round or dovetail it in. The men who ignored it won the first and second prizes - the first prize going to Walter Burley Griffin of Chicago; the second prize to E. Saarinen, of Finland; whilst the third prize went to Dr. A. Gache, of Paris.

One of the judges disagreed with the other two, favoring an Australian design. This minority design the Government purchased for £400.

Section IX / THE PLANS THAT PLEASED

Griffin's plan shows he has utilised the Molonglo River for developing five basins which determine the location of the public

groups. Many critics consider that so much water will be difficult to obtain, but the Molonglo is in flood twice a year, and Griffin has practically followed the flood level line, which in the eastern lake gives an area of about six square miles.



A LINE THE PRIME MINISTER WAS ASKED TO FOLLOW.
(This drawing was made with one continuous line.)

again displayed. The first prize, £1500, was paltry, and the Minister was to have final adjudication. So a storm of disapproval rose from Australian architectural institutions and extended round the world. On the Minister -in-Charge the storm crashed. Yet he was hardly to

The principal centres have been linked together by radial arteries, as in the days of Rome, and wide boulevards will carry the swift city traffic to the outskirts...Of the site, Griffin picturesquely said that it may be considered as an amphitheatre, with Ainslie in

Town Hall centres on the Civic administration, with Commerce, supported on the west by Knowledge, and on the east by Defence.

In connection with the location of the position for the latter, Griffin

It is first used at Canberra and stamps Griffin as a town planner of high ideals and practical purpose.

The second prize design depended on considerable alterations of the site to win horizontal lines. Hills had to be obliterated, and filling-in up to fifty feet was required in places for level terrace...The third-prize design placed the eight departmental buildings in crescent form. The river is not blocked but widened along its course, and the railway station is between the official buildings and the river. Two fine hill-features are crowned with a gaol and a cemetery!

There was no question of the superiority of Griffin's design. John Sulman, FRIBA, a leading Australian authority, stated at the time: "Compared with the second and third designs, the first stands pre-eminent."

That the accepted design was the best possible was later to be disclosed in a bitter battle of criticism that followed its final acceptance.

Political peace did not come with the acceptance of the design for the capital city. Even at the laying of the foundation stone of Canberra, on March 12th, 1913, party feeling was so great that the leading members of the Opposition in the Federal Parliament were uninvited. Canberra was conceived in trouble.



THE DEPARTMENTAL DESIGN THAT WAS ABANDONED.

the north, flanked by Black Mountain and Mount Pleasant forming the top gallery; the slopes forming the auditorium; the water-way the arena; a terraced stage, set with the monumental Government structures; and Red Hill and Mugga Mugga Hill forming the back-scene of the theatrical whole.

He has finely grouped his city zones. The first, the Public Group, we find he has divided into two branches of Government - Federal and Municipal, separated by the water basins. The Federal Group, as being of dominating importance, it given the central position; a clever construction being that such government deliberations require an accessible, but quiet position...Note also his clever allocation of offices, beginning from the Executive, where the bills are considered, to the Legislative where they are made law and passed on to the law department for administration. The

informed me that he located it on the east, as that hill commands attack from the most likely direction - the sea coast, and also best commands the town. He was unaware that the Military College was already on that site.

The Government Group shows the arrangement of Government offices centralised in the house of Parliament... The Recreation Group is north-east of the water axis, and combines physical and mental recreation.

It will be noted, in this wonderful system of groupings, how Griffin has a definite scheme in each arrangement, yet all consonant with the whole.

His University Group is self-contained, and is one of the most remarkable, as well as the most ingenious, of the groupings...It is a most concise and most graphic illustration of the story of the development of human knowledge.

Section X

THE BATTLE FOR FAIR PLAY

Nor did peace come to Canberra with the granting of the prize. The administrative officials once again displayed what seemed a conspiracy against common sense, by rejecting the first-prize design, and adopting one built of parts of the four first plans, like a patchwork quilt.

This 'built-up plan' - as it was commonly called - appeared to acknowledge but one principle of town designing - that of dotting every prominence with a building, but without any idea of logical grouping. It was a travesty on town planning, yet the administrative officials, with an eye on history, subscribed their names on the plan and pushed ahead with the construction work...An electric power-house was erected on the bank of the waterway and a railway rushed from Queanbeyan,

a town five miles eastward. This line has been laid through what is to be the great lake!...

To Colonel Vernon (one of the first councillors of the Town planning Association, NSW) must ever be given the glory that Canberra got fair play. I write this knowing.... His name will ever be associated with the planning of Canberra, because of the manner in which he fought for the adoption of the right plan and the rejection of that (one) almost foisted upon the people. He had all the essentials of a town planner - breadth of vision, patriotism, foresight, the artistic soul, and that democratic impulse that makes men who need no aid from men help those in need...

The professional call for "a square deal for Canberra" was remarkably popular. Australian architects sank all sectional strife in the great national appeal, and the Prime Minister of the day, Hon. Joseph Cook, followed the only rational and fair-minded course open to him. He rejected the Departmental design and sent for Griffin.

Prime Minister Cook actually saved Canberra. It is a distinction and an honor from which his name cannot be disassociated through all the political vicissitudes of the future. But here also tribute must be paid to the Labor leader, Andrew Fisher, though in a minor degree...Under his regime the question of a national capital became more than a perennial subject for aspiring political orators. He launched it as a reality. He achieved. Fisher launched Canberra on the sea of reality; but Cook saved it from destruction...

Griffin came to Australia and was appointed Federal Director of Design and Construction for a period of three years. The Departmental Board was disbanded. On the adoption of the preliminary design, it was immediately decided to prepare conditions for the design for the Federal Parliament House. These were drawn up and approved. Canberra rose from the mire of political intrigue and inept official administration, and had its first opportunity for development.

But though Canberra was saved and the Departmental Board disbanded, an attack on the design came from another quarter. The history of Canberra up to now had been a chain of remarkable

coincidences. It was established when Australia's population was about 4,591,000. Washington was established when the population of the United States was 5,308,483. The area of Australia is 2,974,581 square miles; that of the United States, 2,973,890

fix his business during his Australian engagement. One can excuse the attack, because it was made upon the first publication of the preliminary design. One might have been inclined to charitably consider that the criticisms were inspired by patriotic motives; that all



THE APPROVED PRELIMINARY PLAN BY WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN

miles. The first two designs for Washington were rejected, as were the first two for Canberra. Griffin's first design was supplanted by the Departmental Board's, which was rejected for Griffin's accepted preliminary plan. The accepted plan of Washington was ripped to shreds by the interferers, resulting in a wrecked scheme and an expense of £12,500,000 to reinstate it. The accepted plan for Australia's capital seemed to be destined for the same fate. The new attack, however, was futile. There is little need to give it in detail. Still, a precis of the criticisms will assist the student of town planning in the study of the detail, will confirm the excellence of the accepted design, and reveal the weakness of the criticism, but which criticism may be detrimental to "the city beautiful".

The first shot was fired when Walter Burley Griffin had left for America to

that was desired was that Australia should get the best possible design for her capital city.

Having had good time to study the accepted plan, I was well versed in its details. Having qualified as a public draughtsman, I was professionally competent to judge of its points, and having prepared the military contour map of the Canberra district, I was well acquainted with the site. I was, therefore in a position to judge of the inaccuracy of the criticisms, and took up the defence.

Eighteen letters, attacking the design, appeared in the press. Of these, three were written by displaced Federal city competitors... "(Editors' note: the new attack centred on fears that the sewage of the city would pollute the ornamental lakes, and misunderstandings of the route and alignment of the railway).

